

SICILICISSITAT (PLAUTUS, *MENAECHMI* 12)
AND EARLY GEMINATE WRITING IN LATIN
(WITH AN APPENDIX ON *MEN.* 13)*

BY

MICHAEL FONTAINE

ABSTRACT

1. The morphologically anomalous word *sicilicissitat* in v. 12 of Plautus' *Menaechmi* is, I argue, a Joycean 'portmanteau', or punning composite word coined for the nonce, meaning, simultaneously, the plot (i) 'affects a Sicilian atmosphere', from the Greek verb σικελίζειν, and (ii) 'is double' or 'counts twice', from the Latin noun *sicilicus*, a diacritical mark which served as a *nota* for gemination of consonants. 2. Although the evidence is inconclusive, I suggest that, on the strength of the pun, we can retrodate the period in which *sicilici* were used to the era before Ennius' arrival in Rome in 204 BC. 3. (Appendix) In *Men.* 13 read *antēloquium*, not *antelogium*.

I

The *Menaechmi* begins with the entrance of the Prologue, who steps out onto the stage, greets the audience, and then continues: 'Because poets want their plays to seem more Greek, they like to tell you the action takes place at Athens. Not so with this play—we have a different locale.' And that's not all, he adds (11-2):—

atque adeo hoc argumentum graecissat; tamen
non atticissat, uerum sicilicissitat.

sicilicissitat P (*sicilicis sitat B*, *sycilicissitat C*, *sy cilicissitat D*) : *deest A*

This celebrated couplet is usually thought to mean, as Nixon translates in the Loeb, 'And though this argument is à la Greek,

* I would like to thank Michael Weiss, Malcolm Hyman, and *Mnemosyne's* anonymous referee, each of whom very generously read one or more earlier drafts of this paper, raised vigorous objections, and improved it in many places; that their names appear here should not imply that they agree with me on all points. I am also indebted to The Honorable Faith S. Hochberg for valuable bibliographic assistance. I am of course responsible for whatever mistakes or imprecisions remain.

yet it is not à l'Attic but rather à la Sicilian.' Why? If *atticissat* suggests to a Roman audience (i) a play set in Athens, and (ii) the mannered or staid comedy of Menander, then a comedy that *sicilicissat* evidently promises not only (i) a play set in Sicily, but also (ii) an unusually lively performance like the farce of Epicharmus or Rhinthon, or as we see depicted on the φλώαξ vases of southern Italy. The word also presages copious punning, for which the Sicilians possessed a well-known fondness, as attested by Cicero's observation (*Ver.* 4.95) that *numquam tam male est Siculis quin aliquid facete et commode dicant*. Here, then, we are to see a play that justifies Horace's remark (*Ep.* 2.1.58) that Plautus is said *ad exemplar Siculi proferare Epicharmi*. This, at least, is how commentators have understood the word *sicilicissat*.

But the tripartite formulation of *graecissat* ~ *atticissat* ~ *sicilicissat* looks suspiciously like the setup for a joke, and ordinary human experience shows that, as with most *tricola*, it is the final word that contains the punch line. A closer look at the context strengthens our suspicion. By its own admission, the couplet is a gratuitous addition to the Prologue's speech (*atque adeo . . .*). And the fact is deliberately left obscure that the only connection the 'plot' actually has to Sicily is the two Menaechmuses' Syracusan birth: for the kidnapping took place on the mainland, in Tarentum, and the scene of the play is Epidamnus, in Illyria. While the comedian was himself surely untroubled by so pedantic an objection, the discrepancies entitle us to expect something special from *sicilicissat*. What does it mean?

The word occurs only here. Festus (from Paulus, p. 26 Lindsay) partially cites the line as *ATTICISSAT: Attice loquitur. Plautus: 'non atticissat, sed sicilicissat'; id est Sicule loquitur*. Though faulty memory has banalized the verb's ending from *-itat* to *-at*, Festus rightly preserves the curious and anomalous extra syllable *-ci-* in the middle of the word.¹⁾ This directs our attention to morphology. Latin customarily

1) On the other hand, Consentius, the fifth century grammarian, has banalized the form completely (Keil 1868, 376): *scire autem debemus etiam a nominibus fieri frequentatiua uerba: ab appellatiuo, ut graecizat sicilizat (sicliscat Monac.) patrizat, a proprio, ut lentulizat*. The first three verbs are recollected, if not cited, from Plautus, but as their spelling in *-izat* rather than *-issat* shows, the grammarian got them either from a faulty copy or, more likely, memory.

renders Greek verbs in -ίζειν by attaching the suffix *-issare* directly to the root, whether Greek or Latin, without any intervening addition: hence *graec-issat* and *attic-issat*, regularly formed, for ἑλλην-ίζειν and ἄττικ-ίζειν; and Plautine *malac-issandus es* ~ μαλακ-ίζειν (*Bac.* 73) and *patr-issat* ~ *πατρ-ίζειν, cf. μητρ-ίζειν (*Ps.* 442). Abnormally, however, *sicilic-issitat* corresponds, not to the attested verb σικελ-ίζειν, but, evidently, to a *σικιλικ-ίζειν or *σικελικ-ίζειν. These forms, however, are in Greek literature neither attested nor probable, because, as a rule, Greek verbs in -ίζειν are built only on the simple nominal or adjectival stem, and not the corresponding adjective in -ικός: that is why, for example, we have ἑλληνίζειν, λακωνίζειν, and περσίζειν, from Ἕλλην, Λάκων, and Πέρσης, but not *ἑλληνικίζειν, *λακωνικίζειν, *περσικίζειν, and so on.²⁾ (Note that the verb ἄττικίζειν, from Ἄττικός, is only an apparent exception because no adjectival stem *Ἄττος was in use.) If, then, Plautus had wanted merely to convey the meaning ‘Sicilianizes’, ‘tells a tale in Sicilian style’, he should have said ‘*sicelissat*’ or, allowing for the tendency of Latin to weaken the epsilon, ‘*sicilissat*’. But he did not.³⁾ Why the extra syllable?

The explanation currently accepted was first formulated by one Siberus and reported in Taubmann’s 1605 commentary on Plautus *ad loc.*:—

Est autem τό *Sicilicissitat*, speciei, ut loquuntur, frequentativae. Ut enim ab *Italia* dicimus *Italus* & *Italicus*; ab *Aetolia*, *Aetolus* & *Aetolicus*: a *Getulia* *Getulus*, & *Getulicus*; ab aliis alia: sic a *Sicilia* fit non solum *Siculus* sive *Siculus*, sed etiam, ut hoc loco, *Sicilicus*. Itaque a *Siculo* fit *Sicilisso*: a *Sicilicus* autem *Sicilicisso*: & tandem *Sicilicissito*, frequentativum.

But this explanation is only partially adequate. The use of *-itat* for *-at* is so amply attested in the comedians that it requires no further comment, unless we wish to emphasize that not all such verbs exhibit true frequentative force, and are often used simply to fulfill the requirement that the final foot of the verse be of iambic shape.⁴⁾

2) See the recent discussion in Hyman 2002, 16-7.

3) That did not stop a number of nineteenth century editors from trying to make him say that, however: see the collection of emendations in Ritschl 1889, *ad loc.*

4) According to Conrad (1926, 43, with statistics), Plautus’ goal in using *-itare* verbs merely to fill out the meter is to secure the coincidence of sense-end and

The medial syllable *-ci-*, however, cannot be so easily expedited, because, discounting the present passage, there is no evidence that Latin ever had an adjective **Sicilicus* or **Sicilus* meaning 'Sicilian'. Siberus sweeps this embarrassment under the rug with the pres-tidigitation "*Sicilus sive Siculus*", thereby obscuring the fact that Latin knows only the latter word. If Plautus had meant the word to be pronounced *siculicissitat* (on an unattested Latin base **siculic-us*, normally formed from *sicul-us*) or *sicelicissitat* (on the Greek base σικελικ-ός, but abnormally formed, cf. *graec-issat*, not **hellen-issat*, for ἑλλην-ίξει) he probably would have written the word that way.

It also will not do to explain the extra syllable, as some would, as no more than a case of 'psychological attraction'; that is to say, that, because both *atticissat* and *graecissat* have a hard *c* sound immediately before the ending *-issat*, and can therefore be falsely segmented as *grae-cissat* and *atti-cissat*, so the Prologue, either from a sort of slip of the tongue, or a desire for symmetry, says *sicilicissitat*. On this view, we would then have a literary representation of mental error or linguistic lapse uttered by a comic speaker, but without any real reason for it; and that sort of thing cannot be easily paralleled in Plautus; indeed, to think that such was the aim here is tantamount to our trusting a parasite called 'Peniculus' who tells us that his name means 'brush'. It certainly seems easier to believe that the surface parallelism of the sounds here is not the joke itself; rather, it is, as so often elsewhere, the vehicle or the means whereby Plautus sets up a joke—and especially a pun.

What, then, is the joke here? My own view is this. *Sicilicissitat* is a comic nonce-formation, or 'portmanteau',⁵⁾ like *uirgidemia* (from

verse-end; in order, that is to say, to prevent the sense of one verse from running over into the next. (On this phenomenon in general, see Fraenkel's three papers on 'Kolon und Satz' in Fraenkel 1964, 73-139.) See also Dunkel 1996.

Incidentally, it is a startling coincidence, but no more, that both Siberus and Consentius (n. 1 above) designate the verb a 'frequentative'. By that label Siberus means, as we would expect, that verbs ending in *-itare* connote habitual force. On the other hand, Consentius apparently means, as we would not expect, that denominal verbs ending in *-izare* which refer to a class of persons (i.e., *ab appellatiuo*) have frequentative semantics ('to behave as an individual of class *x* does habitually').

5) 'Portmanteau' is the term generally favored by literary critics for these composite formations, exemplified in English above all by Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (here see, in general, Attridge 1988); some linguists prefer the term 'blend'. Freud 1905, 16-22 has a good discussion of the theoretical operations of humorous portmanteau words (which he calls 'condensation jokes') in several different languages.

uirga and *uindemia*, *Rud.* 636, at verse-end) or *Crucisalus* (from *crux* and *Chrysalus*, *Bac.* 362) that combines the meanings of (i) the Greek verb σικελίζειν with (ii) the Latin noun *sicilicus*.

What, then, is a *sicilicus*?⁶⁾ Several imperial grammarians (but not, unfortunately, the *OLD*) tell us that the ‘ancients’ indicated consonantal gemination, not by writing the letter twice, but by making a small sickle-shaped mark above a letter to show that it counted double. The earliest mention of this method of writing is the notice of Nisus, a grammarian of the first century AD (fr. 5 Mazzarino): (*quoniam*) *antiqui non geminauerint <consonantes>, sed loco geminationis notam superposuerint*. From Isidore (*Etym.* 1.27.29) we learn that this ‘nota’ was called a ‘sicilicus’: *sic et ubi litterae consonantes geminabantur, sicilicum superponebant . . . [.] ueteres enim non duplicabant litteras, sed supra sicilicos adponebant; qua nota admonebatur lector geminandam esse litteram*. The *sicilicus* was, therefore, a diacritical *geminationis nota*, or ‘indication of twinning’.

In the words *hoc argumentum sicilicissitat*, the Prologue is thus saying simultaneously, (i) ‘our plot affects a Sicilian atmosphere’, evoking Sicily in the several associations of farce, puns, and locality already discussed; and (ii) ‘our plot *geminatur*’, or ‘our plot counts double—a two-for-one extravaganza’, with obvious reference to the play’s ‘twin’ protagonists. Indeed, the brothers’ twin status is remarked on with the word *gemini* no fewer than eight times in the Prologue’s speech alone (vv. 18, 26, 40, 48, 58, 68, 69, and 71), and a bit later the word *geminus* is cause for a pun on *gemere* (v. 257). The play on words here is possible in Latin because the Romans peculiarly applied the same word *geminus* not only to ‘twin siblings’, but also to ‘double consonants’, a specialized meaning attested at least as early as Lucilius (cf. fr. 381 Marx).

I add finally that this clever pun supports the suggestion made by A.S. Gratwick (1993, *ad v.* 43) that Plautus named each of his

6) Since Plautus will disregard or distort the natural quantity of a vowel to make a pun (see, for instance, *Rud.* 1225 *infelicit* ~ *licentia*; *Rud.* 1306 f. *medicus* ~ *mendicus*), the apparent discrepancy between the prosody of *sicilicus* (as our dictionaries give it) and *sicilicissitat* is really only of passing interest. But I am not convinced that *sicilicus* is the correct prosody anyway, since our sole evidence, the anonymous hexameter poem *de Ponderibus* (written c. AD 400, ed. Hulstsch 1866, 88-98), twice scans the word *sicilicus*, suggesting a derivation from *sicilis* ‘sickle’ (Pliny *Nat.* 6.38, following Varro) rather than *sicilis* ‘spike’; cf. Mariotti 1967, 206-7; *contra*, see Oliver 1966, 147, n. 60.

twin protagonists ‘Menaechmus’ in honor of the Alexandrian mathematician Menaechmus of Syracuse (*fl.* mid-fourth century), renowned for his method of ‘duplicating’ the cube by conic sections.⁷⁾

II

Let us now address a pressing question. When were these *sicilici* that the grammarians speak of used? The view prevalent today is that advocated by R.P. Oliver, whose 1966 investigation remains the most detailed study to date. Oliver argues that *sicilicus* was merely an older name for the *apex*, that is, the rising line written above a vowel to indicate length, a mark which is mentioned several times by ancient authors and which we see today on numerous Latin inscriptions. Oliver further sets a *terminus ante quem* of 104 BC for the first appearance of these *sicilici* in Latin writing. Since the *Menaechmi* dates to perhaps 200 BC, and since Plautus died in 184 BC or shortly thereafter, it appears that in our pun *sicilicissitat* we may have the earliest ‘evidence’ (I use the term loosely, of course) for the use of *sicilici*, and this roughly a century earlier than Oliver’s *terminus*. Even if we believe, with Osann (and others: see the discussions in Masciadri 1996, 138-40 and Abel 1955, 73 and 138), that the couplet containing the pun is a later interpolation in the text of Plautus, the interpolation will probably not have been made more than a generation or so after Plautus’ death, and will necessarily have been made before the time of Verrius Flaccus (*fl.* first

7) Here I will anticipate an objection from those who assume *a priori* that the ‘literate’ connotations of *sicilicissitat*, or indeed of the historical significance of the name ‘Menaechmus’, are too learned or abstruse for the Roman audience to have perceived; for any such objection merely begs the question, overly prescriptively, of what meaning ‘the audience’ (whose composition we deduce from internal evidence alone, and which was certainly no monolith anyway) ‘could’ or ‘could not’ have detected. It seems more prudent rather to raise our estimation of the capabilities of at least the educated members in the Plautine audience. Gratwick (1990) sums up the situation simply and precisely. In demonstrating that the Plautine names ‘Lycus’, ‘Ballio’, and ‘Diniarchus’ bear clever secondary connotations in addition to their obvious meanings, he comments (306), “these [recondite] connotations are *subaudienda*, but clearly there”, and that (*ibid.*), “in concocting non-words and names . . . [Plautus] was certainly inviting the *cognoscenti* to pick up the exact implication[s]” of these unusual forms.

century BC-first century AD), whence Festus' citation of the line derives, and still, therefore, within the temporal limits prescribed by Oliver.

Yet the matter is not so easily settled, for at least one scholar has thought that the *sicilicus* belongs to a much later era. I. Mariotti says expressly (1967, 161), "Dalle iscrizioni appare chiaramente che l'uso del sicilico non è molto antico". In light of the discrepancy between these two views, I wish now to offer a fresh review of the evidence in hopes of throwing light on an inveterate question of Republican Latin orthography; for, while the evidence of *sicilici* will not help us date Plautus' play, I believe that we can rather refine our understanding of *sicilici* and their date on the strength of Plautus' pun. Let me add in anticipation that, while what follows here is in some sense speculative, it is not, I trust, overly imaginative.

Our knowledge of the *sicilicus* and its function⁸⁾ rests entirely on three ancient testimonia from imperial grammarians, two of which were partially quoted above. Let us now examine them more closely. They are, in full:—

(1) Nisus, first century AD, 'Ars' fr. 5 Mazzarino = Velius Longus *de Orthographia*, second century AD, in Keil, *Gramm. Lat.* 7, 80): Nisus auctor est ut 'comese' et 'asuese' per unum 's' scribamus et dicit rationem, quia iuxta productam uocalem <geminata add. Keil> consonans progredi non soleat, et quoniam antiqui non geminauerint <consonantes add. Keil>, sed loco geminationis notam superposuerint.

(2) Marius Victorinus, fourth century AD, *Ars grammatica* 4.2 Mariotti (= Keil, *Gramm. Lat.* 6, 8): . . . antiqui . . . consonantes litteras non geminabant, ut in his, ANNIUS LUCULLUS MARCELLUS MUMMIUS (Oliver 1966, MEMMIUS *codd.*), et cetera his similia, sed supra litteram quam geminari oportebat sicilicum imponebant (ponebant Keil), cuius figura haec est A (*signum sic ostendit B; om. Z; deest A*),⁹⁾ idque erat signum geminandi, sicut apparet in multis adhuc ueteribus ita scriptis libris.

8) One is concerned here solely with the *sicilicus* in its capacity as a mark of consonantal gemination. The (same, or a homonymous) *sicilicus* had other uses as well, viz., to express the fraction 1/48th; and as a mark of syntactic punctuation approximating our comma. For details see Wingo 1972, 114-9.

9) Keil, Mariotti, and Dahlmann 1970, 133 n. 1, agree that the mark given in manuscript B (where alone it is preserved, and which I have not inspected myself) most closely resembles a majuscule lambda, as printed above, and not a Ϸ, as it appears on the three inscriptions discussed below. On these shapes, see Mariotti's note on p. 161.

(3) Isidore, seventh century AD, *Etymologiae* 1.27.29 Lindsay: sic et ubi litterae consonantes geminabantur, sicilicum superponebant, ut ‘cella’, ‘serra’, ‘asserēs’.¹⁰) ueteres enim non duplicabant litteras, sed supra sicilicos adponebant, qua nota admonebatur lector geminandam esse litteram.

Despite the considerable period of time separating their authors from one another, these passages, which apparently derive at least in part from a common source, all define the *sicilicus* and its use both clearly and consistently. We can summarize their statements in the following way:—

The ‘ancients’ (*antiqui* or *ueteres*) did not mark a geminate consonant by writing the letter twice. Instead (*sed*), they placed a mark (*geminatio- nis nota*, or *signum geminandi*), called a ‘*sicilicus*’, above (*super* or *supra*) the geminand letter, which signaled to the reader that the consonant counted double.

Observe that the passages do *not* speak of *sicilicus*-notation and double letter-notation as alternate or competing systems of writing that exist side by side. It is quite the opposite: the ancients used *sicilici*, they say, *because* (*quoniam*, and *enim*) they did not write double letters. The imperfect tense of the verbs used to describe these operations shows (as does, of course, the very discussion thereof) that the practice of writing *sicilicus*-notation had become obsolete by the grammarians’ time; and that it had been obsolete for a very long time, we can infer from the designation of its users as ‘ancients’. Naturally, these ‘ancients’ are undated (and undatable), but they are called *antiqui* already by Nisus in the first century AD. Observe also Victorinus’ assurance that *sicilicus*-notation could still be found in his own day ‘in many old books’ (*sicut apparet in multis adhuc ueteribus ita scriptis libris*), an important point to which we will return.

It has been uncomfortably observed in modern times that we have virtually no physical evidence to corroborate these passages. Not a single extant manuscript, wax tablet, papyrus, coin, or graffito bears any trace of a *sicilicus* used to mark gemination, and the evi-

10) Oliver 1966, 145 n. 53, argues that these words should be printed CĒLA, SĒRA, AŚĒRES, or else we must emend the text to *ut <in> ‘cella’*, etc. His first instinct seems correct; but since the manuscripts do not preserve the mark, which might have helped us determine whether it was identical to the mark on the inscriptions, I print the text as Lindsay does.

dence on inscriptions amounts to almost nothing. Although we have thousands of Roman inscriptions that bear *apices*, interpuncts, and other diacritical marks that serve a variety of functions, out of all of these there are, to my knowledge, three, and only three, inscriptions on which a *sicilicus* is said to appear.¹¹⁾ The fact alone that it appears but seldom on inscriptions provides grounds for doubting its widespread use in late republican and imperial times. Moreover, the evidentiary value of even the three alleged ‘sicilate’ inscriptions is not very strong.

Let us examine them briefly. In approximate chronological order, they are:—

- (1) SABEĻIO for *Sabellio* (CIL 1².2212, from the late Republic or early Augustan period);
- (2) OŚA for *ossa* (CIL 10.3743, from the Augustan period); and
- (3) MUMĪAES for *Mummaes* (CIL 6.21736, from the Augustan period).

It was the relatively late date of these three inscriptions that led Mariotti to the unfortunate conclusion that the use of the *sicilicus* “chiaramente non è molto antico” (1967, 161): unfortunate, because it stands in exact and manifest contradiction to the information asserted by our three authorities that the *sicilicus* was an ancient symbol—and it is from these authorities alone that we know of the *sicilicus*’ existence in the first place. A closer look at the stones, too, reveals that the second two examples are somewhat problematic. In example (3), the word ANNOS, written with double consonants, appears beside the abbreviated word MUMĪAES; and since this again contradicts the given information that the two notations were not employed in tandem, it cannot be an example of the *sicilicus* that the grammarians describe, unless its use here constitutes an archaism. Example (2) is somewhat suspect because the word OŚA sits flush with the right hand margin, suggesting, perhaps, the stonecutter miscalculated how much horizontal space he needed for the word and came up short. If so, we can suppose that he merely inserted a mark to indicate that a letter was missing rather than begin afresh with a

11) I exclude the few irrelevant cases such as SERŪS (CIL 12.1598) or SALŪM (CIL 12.3499), adduced by Oliver, where the mark indicates, not consonantal gemination, but consonantal *v* followed by a vowel *u*; and also those cases in which a mark above a single letter signifies an entire word; for details, see Oliver 1966, 144-9.

new stone. Let me add that there is no denying that the mark found in these two examples signifies gemination, for that is clearly its function. But in the circumstances, the inscriptions can at most bear witness to an archaizing use of *sicilicus*-notation, not contemporary usage; and once we admit the possibility of archaizing *sicilici*, example (1) above is also impeached as a witness to contemporary use, since it is not much older than the other two—and was certainly carved at a time when Romans were spelling geminate consonants with two letters. Another possibility, and perhaps a more natural deduction, is that these inscriptions do not at all exemplify the *sicilicus* described by our authorities. What we have is probably just a vocalic *apex* placed analogically over a consonant, or some other similar mark whose name we do not know, performing the obvious role of indicating an abbreviated letter.¹²⁾

Oliver inclined more or less to this latter view. Thus he says, speaking of the *sicilicus* or *apex* generally (1966, 156), “The mark was accordingly used above both consonants and vowels without regard for the nice linguistic distinction that a double consonant was to be pronounced twice, whereas a geminated vowel was to be pronounced but once, though protracted in utterance.” But he went astray when, from these few specific examples, he tried to extrapolate a universal rule holding that the *apex* and the *sicilicus* had always been, in fact, one and the same. Finding that the oldest inscription bearing an *apex* dates to 104 BC (MVRVM, CIL 1².679), Oliver further concluded that the mark had been introduced at some point prior to that. He accounted for the two names by speculating that the mark was called at first ‘*sicilicus*’ from its shape and then, by Quintilian’s time, ‘*apex*’.

This view cannot be right either. Not only does it contradict the information given by the grammarians for just the same reasons that Mariotti’s view had, it also makes *sicilicus*- (i.e., *apex*-) notation and double-consonant notation into contemporaneous writing systems, a situation expressly ruled out by the statements of the grammarians, who clearly tell us that the ancients had used *sicilici* ‘because’ (*quoniam*, as Nisus says; *enim*, Isidore) they did not write geminate

12) Of course, all three inscriptions need not share the same explanation.

letters doubly. Moreover, Oliver's contention that *sicilicus* was the older name for *apex* is not supported by any ancient authority. It is only because Isidore, while compiling his encyclopedia in the seventh century, casually and tersely remarked that the *apex* and *sicilicus* had once performed analogous functions that anyone was ever misled to connect them in the first place.¹³⁾ Had Isidore taken the trouble to specify that the two notations had belonged to different eras and different media, modern scholarship would have been spared the long detour of looking for *sicilici* on stone in the first place.¹⁴⁾

This brings us back, then, to our original question: who *did* use the *sicilicus*, and when? Our authorities' unanimous statement that it was employed 'because'—and therefore, *when*—'the ancients were not writing double consonants' points unequivocally to a specific period in Rome's history. Ancient grammarians explicitly tell us that double consonants were not used in the earliest Latin writing, and their statements are confirmed by numerous old Latin inscriptions, which do not show gemination at all.¹⁵⁾ According to Festus, Ennius was believed to have introduced double consonant-notation.¹⁶⁾ This time period, too, though not of course the attribution of authorship, is generally corroborated by inscriptions, which show the new notation gradually taking hold: in the decree of Aemilius Paulus of 189 BC (CIL 2.5021), some geminate consonants are written doubly, others are not, and one word is even written both ways (*posedis-ent . . . possidere*). The conservative orthography of the *senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus*, of three years later, however, does not show any gemination.¹⁷⁾ Shortly thereafter, double consonants appear on inscriptions sporadically, become fairly common by about 135 BC, and

13) At the end of his discussion of orthography, Isidore says (1.27.29): *in dubiis quoque uerbis consuetudo ueterum erat ut, cum eadem littera alium intellectum correpta, alium producta haberet, longae syllabae apicem adponebant; utputa 'populus' arborem significaret, an hominum multitudinem, apice distinguebatur. sic et ubi litterae consonantes geminabantur, sicilicum superponebant e. q. s.* (continued in the text *supra*, §3).

14) The error can be directly traced to Hübner 1870, 413-5, later repeated and thereby canonized in Hübner 1885, lxxvi.

15) See the recent discussion in Perini 1983.

16) Cf. p. 374 Lindsay: *nulla tunc geminabatur littera in scribendo. quam consuetudinem Ennius mutauisse fertur, utpote Graecus Graeco more usus.*

17) The few older inscriptions showing double consonants are problematic: cf. Perini 1983, 147-8.

by 100 BC become completely regular.¹⁸⁾ These circumstances, and especially the absence of marked gemination on the older Latin inscriptions, have led to a general assumption holding that pre-Ennian writers such as Livius, Naevius, Plautus, and the rest, had *no* means of indicating consonantal gemination whatever.¹⁹⁾

But this assumption is neither warranted nor, it seems, correct. For scarcely could it be more clearly stated than it is by the three authorities cited above that the ‘ancients’ *did* have a way of marking gemination in pre-Ennian times: namely, they used *sicilici*. An unprejudiced reading of the testimonia shows that this is precisely the import, and indeed, the very *raison d’être*, of the grammarians’ discussion: *because* the ancients did not write double consonants, they *instead* (*sed*) put a mark to indicate to the reader that the consonant was geminate. The word ‘because’ (*quoniam, enim*) insisted on by the authorities can thus *only* be taken to refer to the period before the Ennian reform. We can accordingly assign the period of the *sicilicus*’ currency to the era prior to Ennius’ arrival in Rome—traditionally, 204 BC. Its usage will have persisted among conservatives for some time thereafter, waned as double consonant-notation became standard, and fallen into general desuetude toward the end of the second century BC. That the mark does not appear in our few contemporary Latin inscriptions should not necessarily cause us any surprise, because Victorinus explicitly informs us that the *sicilicus* had been employed, not in inscriptions, but in old books (*sicut apparet in multis adhuc ueteribus ita scriptis libris*). Furthermore, there really are no grounds for distrusting Victorinus on this point, because, as Oliver ingeniously demonstrates, Victorinus actually drew the examples that he gives from a book of Republican consuls.²⁰⁾ It can

18) See Leumann-Hofmann-Szantyr 1965, 14-5.

19) For example, X. Ballester, in a recent discussion, says (1998, 27), “En época arcaica la relevante oposición fonológica del tipo *annus—anus* no estaba grafematizada (<anus>)”.

20) Thus Oliver (1966, 130):—“These writers, furthermore, do not mention inscriptions; they are grammarians interested in written books, and when they cite evidence at all, it is the evidence of books preserved from ages in which the diacritical signs were in current use.” *Ibid.*, n. 4:—“In the fourth century, Marius Victorinus, speaking of the *sicilicus* (p. 8 Keil), appeals to the evidence, not of inscriptions, but of written books.” For the proof of Victorinus’ source, see Oliver 1966, 145-6, with n. 54.

hardly be a coincidence that the four consuls he names are from the mid-second century BC.²¹⁾

Other reasons may also account for the absence of *sicilici* on inscriptions. Possibly the mark seemed appropriate only to the medium of books, or was thought offensive to calligraphy; but the most obvious reason is simply that of economy. If all geminate consonants were marked with a *sicilicus* 'above' the letter (as we are told, and not 'beside' it), an inscription's height would have to be considerably increased: if, for example, a geminate consonant were to appear in every other line of an inscription, the stone might have to be as much as fifty percent taller.²²⁾ The wasted space thereby produced would increase not only the inscription's cost, but would also—inscriptions being read top to bottom—make reading it more difficult for the reader.²³⁾

Identifying the *sicilicus* as a pre-Ennian book device, therefore, may provide us with a fresh insight into the Republican dramatists' way of writing. Can we really believe that in adopting his stress-based Latin language to Greek quantitative meters, the Roman playwright had no graphic means of showing an actor where the quality of a vowel was to be pronounced naturally short, but held for double time (i.e., a syllable long by position), or that he had no means to disambiguate two or more homographs? Undoubtedly actors who wished to scan their lines accurately will have needed at least occasional assistance, if not for familiar Latin words, certainly for foreign

21) Respectively, the consuls were Annius, 153; Marcellus, 152; Lucullus, 151; and Mummius, 146.

22) Or even taller still: the *senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus*, for example, which has geminate letters in twenty-five of its thirty lines of text, would have to be eighty-three percent taller than it is.

23) We do not know, however, if all geminates were indicated. Quintilian, speaking of the *apex*, summarizes the situation in these words (1.7.2-3):—*ut longis syllabis omnibus adponere apicem ineptissimum est, quia plurimae natura ipsa uerbi quod scribitur patent, sed interim necessarium, cum eadem littera alium atque alium intellectum, prout correpta uel producta est, facit: ut 'malus' arborem significet an hominem non bonum apice distinguitur, 'palus' aliud priore syllaba longa, aliud sequenti significat, et cum eadem littera nominatiuo casu breuis, ablatiue longa est, utrum sequamur plerumque hac nota monendi sumus.* The situation was probably the same with geminate consonants, though this cannot be proven, for we lack the proper data: in an examination of the pre-Ennian old Latin inscriptions, I find no example of geminate ambiguity such as the choice afforded by, for example, *erat* (i.e., *erat* or *errat*).

words and poetic neologisms. I think it likely, therefore, that the poetry itself was the stimulus in response to which the *sicilicus* was devised.

Of course, since we do not possess any book or part thereof from the age of Ennius or earlier, and we are unlikely ever to find one, the above argument cannot rise above the level of hypothesis. Yet this hypothesis accords in all respects both with our given information about the *sicilicus* and with the epigraphic record. Plautus' pun in *sicilicissitat* seems strongly to suggest that he and his audience knew the *sicilicus*, and in the circumstances a pun is probably the best 'evidence' we can hope for.

Appendix: *Antelogium* (*Men.* 13)

The Prologue says:

atque adeo hoc argumentum graecissat, tamen
 non atticissat, uerum sicilicissat.
 huic argumento | antelogium | hoc fuit. 13
 nunc argumentum uobis demensum dabo . . .

antelogium *Muretus* : ante elongium *B*¹ : ante elogium *B*²*CD* : antilogium
Ausonius 405.3

The modern vulgate is Muretus' *antelogium*, understood, as Lambinus says (*ad loc.*), as a "vox ex Latina et Graeca composita significatque id omne quod ante orationem legitimam prooemii causa dicitur", i.e., *antē-λόγιον*, 'proface', or 'forelogue'. Certainly that is Plautus' surface meaning, but the morphology is puzzling. Alternatively, if we assume that these same letters are to represent *ant(e)-ēlogium*, translated by Gratwick (1993, *ad loc.*) 'preliminary notice', 'advertisement', we press the meaning of *elogium* rather hard. No great credence is to be given to Ausonius' improbably spelled *antilogium* (*ut Plautus ait, interim erunt antilogium fabularum*) because his word *fabularum* for Plautus' *argumento* reveals that he was citing from memory, and, anyway, ἀντιλέγω etc. connotes contradiction, not temporal priority.

The true reading can rather be got by considering the word's relation to the *argumentum*, mentioned thrice in the surrounding lines. *Eloqui* is Plautus' frequent, perhaps even technical, term for 'explaining',

or 'narrating' the *argumentum* to the audience: *Am.* 51 *post argumentum huius eloquar tragoediae*; *Mer.* 2 *et argumentum et meos amores eloquar*; *Mil.* 85 *et argumentum et nomen uobis eloquar*; *Rud.* 31 *nunc, huc qua causa ueni, argumentum eloquar*; and so on.²⁴)

Read, therefore:—

huic argumento anteloquium hoc fuit.

i.e., *ant(e)-eloquium*, 'pre-eloquium', 'proem before the exposition of the plot proper'. It is true that a noun *eloquium* meaning 'exposition of the plot' derived from *eloquor* is not otherwise attested in Plautus, but such coinages were easy enough *more Plautino*: compare his *multiloquium*, *parumloquium*, *pauciloquium*, *stultiloquium*.

The noun *anteloquium* does not recur in Latin until Symmachus (*Ep.* 1.77) and the Christian authors following him, as the *Thesaurus*, s.v., shows. Whether Symmachus or another late author found the word in Plautus, or merely coined it as circumstances dictated, is unknown.

Cornell University, Department of Classics
120 Goldwin Smith Hall
ITHACA, NY 14853-3201
USA
mf268@cornell.edu

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24) The verb is also used of specific plot elements in prologues in direct audience address: *Am.* 17 *nunc cuius iussu uenio et quam ob rem uenerim dicam simulque ipse eloquar nomen meum*; *Aul.* 1 *ne quis miretur qui sim, paucis eloquar*; *Trin.* 10-1 *sed ea huc quid introierit impulsu meo accipite et date uociuas aures dum eloquor*. Similar is *Ps.* 9-12, *quid est quod tu exanimatus iam hos multos dies gestas tabellas tecum . . . ? eloquere, ut quod ego nescio id tecum sciam*.

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